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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2597
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SUBJECT: PRT/KUNDUZ: STRONG INDICATIONS THAT
LOCAL DRUG LORDS BEHIND ATTACK IN BADAKHSAN

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. There are strong indications that the May 30 attack on a USAID alternative livelihoods contractor in the remote river valley district of Darayeen in Badakhshan province was perpetrated by local drug lords who feared that the contractor was undermining their multimillion dollar poppy cultivation enterprise. However, provincial law enforcement and intelligence officials -- many of whom themselves are suspected of being involved in drug trafficking and production -- are quick to deny any direct link between the attack and local drug lords. They still insist the crime was carried out by Taliban elements supported by Pakistan or by someone else from outside province, or was the accidental result of factional fighting within the district. The political power of these local drug lords probably explains why Darayeen has never been targeted for eradication by the governor. If Kabul decides to deploy the Afghan Eradication Force (AEF) to Darayeen, the AEF needs to go in with extra force and be prepared for violent resistance. Any such deployment should be closely coordinated with PRT Faizabad and provincial authorities. In the longer term, one way to break the hold that these drug lords have on isolated, remote river valleys in Argoo, Darayeen, and Teshkan is to open them up to greater access by building a major, paved road through their district centers. A good opportunity to do that will be in the upcoming Kishim-Faizabad road project. END SUMMARY.

ATTACK ON PADCO

12. (SBU) On May 30, a vehicle from PADCO, a USAID contractor responsible for carrying out alternative livelihood programs in Badakhshan and Takhar provinces, was attacked with a powerful improvised explosive device (IED) that instantly killed an Afghan employee riding in the front right passenger seat and mortally injured the Afghan driver. Miraculously, the two Americans riding in the back seat of the vehicle, one of whom was the deputy chief of party for PADCO, escaped with only minor injuries. It is clear, however, that had the bomb, which appears to have been remotely detonated, exploded just a foot further to the rear of the unarmored Toyota Land Cruiser, the Americans would have been seriously injured, if not killed. While there have been a number of attacks against PRT Faizabad and other military forces in Badakhshan over the past couple of years, civilians have been directly targeted very rarely.

DARAYEEN: INDUSTRIAL-SCALE POPPY CULTIVATION

13. (SBU) The attack on PADCO occurred in Darayeen district, a remote, high-altitude river valley in the mountains about three hours southwest of the provincial capital of Feyzabad, which can only be reached by transversing a narrow, steep dirt road.

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PRToff had an opportunity to visit Darayeen, including the site of the explosion, the day after the attack, as part of previously scheduled German CIMIC patrol to the district. There he found a PADCO vehicle destroyed almost beyond recognition and a valley almost completely devoted to the growing of poppy. One sees many poppy fields in other parts of Takhar and Badakhshan, but not like in the Darayeen Valley. Almost all the cultivated land in Darayeen valley is used for growing poppy. Practically no other crops are grown. In most other poppy-producing areas in the northeast, poppy accounts for 20-25 percent of the crop grown (a poppy patch next to a much larger wheat field, for example), but in Darayeen, the percentage is much higher. IOM, who has been overseeing a DFID-funded road project in Darayeen over the past several months, reports that the contractor has had trouble finding local labor lately because everyone in the district is so preoccupied with growing poppy.

14. (SBU) The planting of poppy appears to have been deliberately staggered so that the harvest will be spread over an extended period of time. Some of the poppy was already being harvested, some was flowering, some was in the hook stage and some was still in the youthful "cabbage" state. Ironically, a lot of the poppy is being irrigated by canals that were dug out and repaired through PADCO-funded cash-for-work programs. Fields that are further from the river, and cannot be irrigated by canals, were being irrigated through expensive water pumps and pipes that normal farmers cannot afford. According to PRT Faizabad, the so-called Upper Bazaar of the district center, also known as Shahr-e Safa, hosts an opium production facility and bazaar -- all just a few hundred meters from the site of the attack on PADCO. IOM

reports that the contractor for the road project in Darayeen has endured a number of security problems, including being shot at and catching someone trying to place an IED next to bridge it was building. The district manager admitted to the contractor that he was under pressure from local poppy-growers to stop the road project because it was making the district too accessible to outsiders.

SEEMINGLY UNDENIABLE CONNECTION

15. (SBU) In short, one gets the impression that local drug lords have taken complete control of the Darayeen Valley and set up a centrally controlled industrial poppy cultivation system. This view is shared by PRT Faizabad, the local UNAMA office and a number of NGOs and IOs based in Faizabad that have extensive experience in the area. They report that the situation in other isolated river valleys in the neighboring districts of Argoo and Teshkan is similar. Given the environment in Darayeen, therefore, it is

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hard to escape the conclusion that the IED was a deliberate attack by drug lords who saw PADCO and its alternative livelihood programs as a threat to their multimillion dollar business. PADCO had an office in Darayeen, which brought a steady stream of foreigners through what has historically been a remote and isolated district. The drug lords clearly wanted PADCO and the foreigners out. Unfortunately, it looks like they have succeeded, at least in one respect. The PADCO head of party has indicated to PRToff that he plans to close the office in Darayeen. On the other hand, the fact that PRT Faizabad went ahead with its previously scheduled CIMIC patrol to the district the day after the explosion sent a very good message that the international community will not be cowed by this attack. The PRT plans to continue to carry out regular patrols and other operations in the area.

AUTHORITIES BLAME OUTSIDERS, POLITICAL RIVALRIES

16. (SBU) While most of the international community in Faizabad believes that local drug lords are the most likely perpetrators of the attack against PADCO, provincial law enforcement authorities -- many of whom are themselves suspected of being involved in drug production and trafficking -- are, not surprisingly, unwilling to acknowledge this. PRToff called on Badakhshan Chief of Police Shahjahan July 1 to thank him for his quick response and assistance on the day of the attack (he personally escorted the two Americans back to Faizabad from Darayeen) and to press him to pursue a vigorous investigation to find those responsible. In response to open-ended questions about who might have carried out the attack, Shahjahan claimed that police had found pieces of a metal pressure-cooker at the scene, indicating that the bomb had been work of well-known anti-government Taliban members operating in Badakhshan with the support of Pakistan. In this connection, he reeled off four names: Abdul Allem Alawi, Qari Amir Allah, Sallamudin and Qari Saifudin. Anticipating the next question, Shahjahan said that the police have not been able to arrest most of these people for the same reason that Osama bin Laden remains

at large -- they have proved too difficult to find. When PRToff noted that the chief of police had not mentioned any possible connection to poppy, Shahjahan gave a dismissive wave and said that the Taliban, terrorism and drugs were all interlinked.

¶7. (SBU) PRToff happened to be meeting with the Badakhshan director of NDS, Abdul Samad Yastali, when the news about the PADCO attack first arrived. Yastali's theory was that the bomb had really been aimed at the new district manager in Darayeen, a former Hezb-e Islami commander, who was at odds with Jamiat adherents in the district. As with the chief of police, Yastali did not make

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any connection between the attack and the fact that Darayeen is one of the biggest poppy-growing areas in the province.

¶8. (SBU) During his May 31 visit to Darayeen with the PRT CIMIC team, PRToff was greeted by District Police Chief Zirat Shah, who had assumed his position only two days earlier, after having served previously as district police chief in the southern district of Kuran Wa Munjan. Shah reported that the local populace was very upset at the attack on PADCO and had been very appreciative of its work in the district. Therefore, he was pretty certain that the attack must have been perpetrated by somebody from outside of Badakhshan. Like the others, he did not think the attack was related to poppy, since people associated PADCO with projects and not with eradication. However, no one has come forward with any information, even though the IED was planted in an open area, visible from 360 degrees for more than a kilometer.

COMMENT

¶9. (SBU) It is unlikely that provincial law enforcement authorities will, on their own, pursue this case and catch those responsible for the attack on PADCO. Not only do the police lack the required technical skills and resources (in Darayeen, the 47 police officers and soldiers have no vehicles or radios, and only a handful of weapons), they appear to have been corrupted from top to bottom by drug money, as evidenced by their refusal to even countenance the possibility that local drug lords could be involved in the attack. So far, unlike in the south of the country, PRT Faizabad sees no clear link between the Taliban and the opium economy in Badakhshan, which appears to be solely controlled by local drug lords.

¶10. (SBU) The power of these local drug lords may also explain why Darayeen has never been targeted for eradication by Governor Majid. The governor's excuse has been that it is too hard to get up to Darayeen and there is plenty of poppy to eradicate in more accessible places like Kishim, but that is probably not the whole story. The fact is that the governor finds it easier to eradicate plots of poppy that individual farmers have grown on their own, than to take on the big drug lords in places like Darayeen. Unfortunately, on eradication, the governor seems to be playing a double game. He appears to be aiming to do just enough to make Kabul think he is serious about eradication, but not enough to upset the powers-that-be in the province. If

Kabul decides to deploy the Afghan Eradication Force (AEF) to Darayeen, the AEF needs to go in with extra force and be prepared for violent resistance. Any such deployment should be closely coordinated with PRT Feyzabad and provincial authorities. The brutal attack on

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PADCO seems to demonstrate the lengths the drug lords are willing to go to defend their empire in Darayeen.

¶11. (SBU) In the longer term, one way to break the hold that these drug lords have on isolated, remote river valleys in Argoo, Darayeen, and Teshkan is to open them up to greater access by building a major, paved road through their district centers. A good opportunity to do that will be in the upcoming Kishim-Feyzabad road project. Building the main road through Argoo, Darayeen and Teshkan (rather than following the current circuitous route along the Kowkcheh River) would not only bring significant improvements to these districts, but it would also cut more than 35 kilometers off what is now a 112-kilometer trip.

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